

DEPARTMENT OF  
AGRICULTURE

DRAWER 10B

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# Abraham Lincoln's Cabinet

Department of Agriculture

Excerpts from newspapers and other  
sources

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December 4, 1957

Dear Dr. McMurtry:

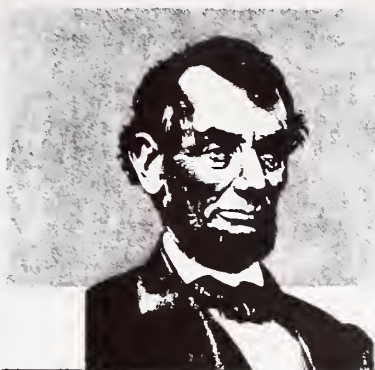
Your letter of October 10, addressed to the Department of Agriculture, has been referred to this Division for further attention.

A search of pertinent printed material in the classified collections has failed to reveal very much information of the part played by President Abraham Lincoln in the establishment of the Department of Agriculture. Works dealing with the history of the Department, if they mention Lincoln, merely state that he signed the bill in 1862 or mention the fact that he appointed Isaac Newton as the first commissioner. One of the most complete statements noted is that of J. Duane Squires in an article entitled "Some Enduring Achievements of Lincoln's Administration, 1861-1865," which was printed in v. V, p. 191-211, of the Abraham Lincoln Quarterly. We quote a portion of the statement referring to the Department:

"So far as the Department of Agriculture is concerned, the Lincoln administration's contribution was to establish it as a truly important branch of our national government. Building on a tiny foundation of previous work in the United States Patent Office, the Congress established the autonomous Department of Agriculture by an Organic Act approved by the President on May 15, 1862. Lincoln promptly appointed his good friend, Isaac Newton, a prominent farmer from Pennsylvania, as the first Commissioner of the new department."

However, Lincoln in his first annual message to Congress, December 3, 1861, did mention the fact that agriculture was then represented in the Government by only a clerkship and that he was of the "opinion that an agricultural and statistical bureau might profitably be organized." (See v. 5, p. 46, of The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln (New Brunswick, N. J., Rutgers University Press, 1953. 9 v.) which were edited by Roy P. Basler).





# Lincoln Lore

Bulletin of The Lincoln National Life Foundation . . . Dr. R. Gerald McMurtry, Editor  
Published each month by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana

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## THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

"It is peculiarly the people's department, in which they feel more directly concerned than in any other." — Lincoln

*The Congressional Globe*, May 20, 1862, page 2216, carried the announcement that the President of the United States had approved and signed on the 15th instant "An Act (H. R. No. 269) to establish a Department of Agriculture."

For many years the agricultural interests of the country had been struggling to get adequate recognition of their important business by the government. In cramped quarters they carried on their agricultural research in the Patent Office which was under the supervision of the Department of the Interior. In April 1862, agriculturalists made a determined effort to secure a separate governmental department to be established at the capital.

The general purpose of such a department was "to diffuse among the people of the United States useful information on subjects connected with agriculture in the most general and comprehensive sense of that word, and to procure, propagate, and distribute among the people new and valuable seeds and plants."

The Act called on the President, acting with the advice and consent of the Senate, to authorize the appointment of a Commissioner of Agriculture. The salary of the Commissioner was to be \$3,000 per annum. This department head in addition to other duties was charged with the task of keeping statistical records and to make periodic reports on particular subjects whenever he desired or whenever required to do so by the President or either House of Congress.



Isaac Newton, Commissioner of Agriculture  
Photograph secured from the United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Information, Washington 25, D. C.

In the enactment of this legislation a great number of amendments were made to the original resolutions. Some Congressmen opposed the creation of the Department due to financial or bureaucratic reasons, while one or two others professed to see objections based on constitutional questions.

George Washington's name was even introduced into the debates as one who considered agriculture of "primary importance to the country." However, it was Abraham Lincoln's recommendations incorporated in his First Annual Message To Congress, on December 3, 1861, that carried the most authority:

"Agriculture, confessedly the largest interest of the nation, has, not a department, nor a bureau, but a clerkship only, assigned to it in the government. While it is fortunate that this great interest is so independent in its nature as to not have demanded and exacted more from the government, I respectfully ask Congress to consider whether something

more cannot be given voluntarily with general advantage.

"Annual reports exhibiting the condition of our agriculture, commerce, and manufactures would present a fund of information of great practical value to the country. While I make no suggestion as to details, I venture the opinion that an agricultural and statistical bureau might profitably be organized."

Isaac Newton, who was in charge of agricultural activities in the Patent Office in May, 1862, became the



first head of the department with the rank of Commissioner. Newton was born in Burlington County, New Jersey, on March 31, 1800 and after receiving a common school education, he married and settled on a farm in Delaware County, Pennsylvania. Recognized as a model farmer of his state he attended many agricultural association meetings and over a long period of years was active in urging Congress to establish a national department of agriculture.

Newton had brought a plan for a separate department to the attention of Presidents Harrison, Taylor, Fillmore, Buchanan and Lincoln, whose personal acquaintance he enjoyed. Even as a government official he continued to reside on his well stocked Pennsylvania farm and every week he sent fresh butter to the White House.

The Commissioner was a Quaker and Lincoln called him "Friend Newton" when they played chess. Newton is also said to have acted as a temporary banker and household intermediary when Mrs. Lincoln sought his advice regarding excessively large department store accounts she could not pay and which she feared to bring to the attention of the President. Newton, according to one authority, would put up the money to pay the bills, if the accounts were not too large, and later Mrs. Lincoln would repay him. However, if the bills were quite large Newton would intercede with Lincoln in behalf of Mrs. Lincoln.

On one occasion Commissioner Newton accompanied Mrs. Lincoln to Georgetown to see a Mrs. Laury, a spiritualist, who "made wonderful revelations to her about her little son Willy . . . and also about things on the earth."

As an agricultural official Newton had a stormy career. His formal education was limited and his critics claimed that he was practically illiterate and utterly incompetent. Yet Newton is credited with having set into motion a well organized department.

Perhaps the worst charge that can be brought against Newton is that he was a gossip and engaged in cabinet intrigue. As a confidant of Edward Bates, the Attorney General, he was constantly repeating rumors about a remodeling and a rearrangement of the Cabinet. Newton even told Bates in great secrecy "that General Halleck was a confirmed opium-eater." Incidentally, Newton kept Bates well supplied with a good variety of seeds, and the Attorney-General called Newton the "head farmer of the country."

At the time of the establishment of the Department, neither Congress, the President or the Commissioner agreed upon what it should accomplish. To the credit of the Commissioner several capable scientists; Townsend Glover, the entomologist; Charles Wetherill, the chemist; Lewis Bollman, the statistician; and William Saunders, the botanist, were assigned important positions within the experimental and scientific divisions of the Department.

In the administration of the Department it was left to Newton to determine objectives and he directed the varied activities with considerable wisdom and clarity.

One innovation, established by Newton on July 10, 1863, was the issuance of a monthly crop report, and this month and day became the traditional date for the release of this important data.

The Department of Agriculture during the Lincoln Administration labored under trying conditions. The Civil War was being waged, and the farmers were straining their energies to provide food for the army, for export and for civilian needs. Europe leaned heavily at this time upon the United States for its agricultural products and when Newton released his July 10, 1863 crop report he wrote: "The world leans on us. To meet demands of this great magnitude is the mission of American agriculture."

Housed in two basement rooms of the old Patent Office Building Newton gave directions, released statistics, offered encouragement, made predictions, and provided scientific know-how, and the American farmers met the challenge during the war years until final victory was won.

Apparently Lincoln was quite proud of the new Department of Agriculture. In his last annual Message to Congress on December 6, 1864 he said: "The Agricultural Department, under the supervision of its pres-

(Continued on page 3)

## ASTROLOGICAL PREDICTIONS

### Lincoln's Assassination

The "Fate of the Nations" for the spring quarter of 1865 was predicted by the editor of *Broughton's Monthly Planet Reader and Astrological Journal* on page 15 of the April, May & June 1865 issue (vol. 6, no. 2).

The predictions for April 1865 were based on the new moon of March 27th. "Jupiter" was found to be "lord of the scheme and was rising in its own house, in good aspect to Saturn in mid-heaven but in opposition to Mars and Herschel, in the seventh house."

This position was described by Dr. L. D. Broughton, the editor of the New York publication as "uncommonly good for the general government and very evil for the Rebels."

The astrologer also predicted that "They (Rebels) are compelled to retreat, and appear to have got to the very last ditch. Indeed some people will think that it is all up with them. But after the middle of this month the wheel of fortune takes a turn in their favor. But not before they are very near conquered, or exhausted."

Financial concerns were informed that "business of all kinds brighten up in this month and people generally are inclined to look on the bright side of the question, although the public health suffers."

Government officials failed to take seriously, if a copy of this magazine came to their attention, Broughton's prediction that "SOME NOTED GENERAL OR PERSON IN HIGH OFFICE, DIES OR IS REMOVED ABOUT THE 17TH OR 18TH DAY."

Broughton constantly read ominous events in Abraham Lincoln's "nativity." In his October, November and December 1864 issue he reprinted his early (September 1860, vol. 1, no. 6) statement that: "We are sorry to say, that he has some rather unfortunate aspects coming on . . ." The astrologer, however, predicted that Lincoln would win the election because "he has much more favorable planetary influences operating in his Nativity (1864) than he had in the last (1860) . . ."

After the election is over, Broughton made it clear that "Mr. Lincoln will have a number of evil aspects afflicting his Nativity (I do not think that any of them will begin to be felt until the election is past) they will be in operation in Nov. and Dec. of this year. During these months, let him be especially on his guard against attempts to take his life; by such as fire arms, and infernal machines." The astrologer also warned in his article "The Fate Of The Nation" for November 1864, (Oct., Nov. & Dec. 1864, vol. 5, no. 1): "Let the president be careful of secret enemies, and also of assassination, during this and the next months."

Broughton's prediction of Lincoln's assassination and death (April 14-15, 1865) was a vindication for those who looked to the stars for the signs of the times. However, some critics wrote Broughton, who was also plagued at times with evil aspects, that in his prediction of Lincoln's death he should have been more particular and pointed. To these charges the astrological editor cited volume and page where his predictions appeared with the comment that it would be difficult to have a prediction more pointed.

In a re-evaluation of Lincoln's "nativity" the editor, who had made a detailed astrological study of the 16th President, wrote: "Indeed judging from the Map of the Heavens for Mr. Lincoln's time and birth, although he was a quiet inoffensive man, bearing malice to none but charity to all, yet it was next to impossible for him to have died a natural death. At the time of Mr. Lincoln's birth, the Sun and Moon were both under the earth, which causes the ascendant to be the 'giver of life,' and being afflicted by the evil planet Saturn, and Mars and Herschel, both in the eleventh house, denoting him being surrounded by secret enemies and false friends, and had it not been for the Moon being in good aspect to the benevolent planet Jupiter, lord of the ascendant, and of course Mr. Lincoln's significator, which aspect caused him to become popular among people generally, it would have been next to impossible for him to have survived up to the middle of last April. At the time of Mr. Lincoln's death, he had the evil planet Saturn retrograding over Mar's place in the eleventh house, and in evil aspect to the Moon's place, and Mar's in the eighth house, (the





**Abraham Lincoln, Sixteenth President of the United States. Born February 12th, 1809, 2 h. 0 m. A. M. Died April 15th, 1865, at 7 h 20 m. A. M.**

Some of my friends and correspondents, have written to me saying that the predictions in regard to the death of Abraham Lincoln, should have been more particular and pointed, than was published under the heading, "Fate of the Nation for April 1865." To those who are inclined to find fault with everything which according to their ideas does not appear to come up to the mark, I refer them to the Nativity of Abraham Lincoln, as published in the Oct., Nov. and Dec. No. for 1864, on page 2d, they will find the following paragraph;

But I might here state, that shortly after the election is over, Mr. Lincoln will have a number of evil aspects afflicting his nativity; (I do not think that any of them will begin to be felt until after the election is past, they will be in operation in Nov. and Dec. of this year. During those months let him be especially on his guard against attempts to take his life, by such as fire arms, and infernal machines)

Also in the same No. under the heading "Fate of the Nation for 1864," they may find the following sentence;

Let the President be careful of secret enemies, and also of assassination, during this and the next months.

It would be difficult to have a prediction more pointed than the above. It is true that I only mentioned it in a rather careless manner in the predictions for the "Fate of the Nation for April, 1865," by stating that some noted general, or person in high office, dies or is removed, about the 17th, or 18th day."

Although I made the predictions about attempts being made to take the President's life; by such as fire arms, &c. some months before it really took place, yet as I stated in Lincoln's Nativity, in the Oct., Nov. and Dec. No. 1864

that shortly after the election is over, Mr. Lincoln will have a number of evil aspects afflicting his Nativity; and of course those evil influences would last through several months.

Broughton's Monthly Planet Reader and Astrological Journal. July, Aug. & Sept. 1865. Vol. 6, No. 3, Pages 23-24.

house of death) just passing an evil aspect of Venus, lady of the eleventh, (the house of friends) all of which would indicate, that near the middle of April he would meet with some great evil, from false friends or secret enemies."

With Lincoln's tragic death a matter of history, Dr. Broughton announced in his July, Aug. & Sept. 1865 issue that he had "intended to publish the nativity of Andrew Johnson, President of the U. S. But for want of room must defer it to the next no."

To give the reader some idea of what to expect, the editor continued the announcement: "I might here state that in some respects he (Johnson) has a very remarkable Nativity. Yet he will have no easy time of it during the period he is in office. From the first of July to the first of Aug. he will have some very evil aspects that will affect his health. But from the 9th of Sept. to the middle of Dec. will be an uncommonly evil period for him; difficulties will surround him; but I am in hopes that his life will be spared. But more of this in my next issue."

Note: See *Lincoln Lore*, Number 1433, July, 1957 for "Astrological Predictions—The Presidential Campaign of 1860."

## AGRICULTURE

(Continued from page 1)

ent energetic and faithful head, is rapidly commending itself to the great and vital interest it was created to advance. It is peculiarly the people's department, in which they feel more directly concerned than in any other, I commend it to the continued attention and fostering care of Congress."

One day in June 1866, when a thunderstorm was heard approaching the capital city, Commissioner Newton remembered that a certain variety of wheat samples had not been cut. Leaving his office on this sultry, hot day and likely wearing a silk hat and frock coat he went to the experimental farm, near the present Bureau of Engraving and Printing to supervise the cutting of the wheat samples before the rain. The wheat samples were likely rescued before the storm, but not before Newton suffered a sunstroke.

The first Commissioner of Agriculture, the originator of the Department's world-famous crop reports, and many other commendable and scientific services, died on June 19, 1867.

## CURIOSITIES OF LETTERS

### (Presidential Campaign of 1864)

To the Editors of the Evening Post:

There are seven letters in Mr. Lincoln's name. There are nine in McClellan's and nine in Pendleton's. Words containing similar numbers of letters happen to illustrate the platforms upon which the candidates stand—thus:—

Lincoln	LIBERTY
fight in the spirit of	JUSTICE
to establish	FREEDOM
and ensure universal	MCCLELLAN
and	PENDLETON
with a	COWARDICE
which is disgraceful to Americans, strengthen	SECESSION
and encourage the	REBELLION
by advocating a	SURRENDER
to	JEFF. DAVIS
SEVEN is the sacred number!	

*Albany Journal*  
Friday, November 11, 1864

## *DAY by DAY on the FARM* by RICHARD ORR

### Lincoln First to Aid Farmers

May 14, 1962

**F**ARM OFFICIALS under the Kennedy administration would like farmers to believe that the Democrats are the only ones who do anything for them, but it can't be denied that a Republican President started it all.

It was President Lincoln who, a century ago on May 15, 1862, signed a bill establishing what is now the department of agriculture. In the beginning, it was an independent bureau set up to encourage the application of science to agriculture, and it was not until 1889 that it was elevated to cabinet rank.

#### *Sees Good for All*

Of his new agriculture bureau, President Lincoln is quoted as having said, "It will one day realize the fondest anticipations of its most sanguine friends and become the fruitful source of advantage of all our people."

Isaac Newton, appointed by Lincoln as the first commissioner of agriculture, observed, "It should be the aim of every young farmer to do not only as well as his father, but to do his best to make two blades of grass grow where but one grew before."

American farmers have done even better than Newton expected them to do. A century ago, one farmer produced enough food and fiber for five persons. Today, one farmer produces enough for 27 persons.

#### *First Staff Totaled 9*

The department of agriculture itself has expanded far beyond what Lincoln and Newton could have envisioned for it. Newton started with nine clerks and assistants in two basement rooms of the patent office, and in time was able to employ a chemist and a specialist on insects to launch his bureau's research activities.

As of last Dec. 30 there were 91,644 employees in the ag-

riculture department, more than three times the number it had 30 years ago. The payroll is well over a half billion dollars a year, and the department's total budget this year is more than 7 billion dollars.

#### *130,000 Field Aids*

In addition, the department employ between 130,000 and 140,000 part time payrollers who are members of state, county, and township agricultural stabilization and conservation committees, which administer price support and subsidy programs at local levels. These committees, in turn, employ thousands of other full time and part time employees.

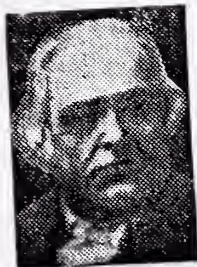
Headquarters of the department are in two huge buildings

in Washington, one a five story structure with 7 miles of corridors. Outside of Washington, it maintains 3,563 buildings with nearly 3 million square feet of floor space. The department maintains 225 laboratories, 76 experimental farms, publishes about 500 new booklets a year, and has more than 7 billion dollars invested in surplus crops.



## Agriculture Pioneers

The man who saved Lincoln's life, when the Civil War President's life



**ISAAC NEWTON**

was threatened by poisoned food, Isaac Newton, started work in the patents office in 1861.

With a limited formal education, he was a pioneer in underground drainage system, good fences, farm buildings and excellent dairy cat-

tle. He was considered the model farmer of Pennsylvania. During the administrations of Harrison, Taylor, Fillmore and Buchanan he tried unsuccessfully to have a department of agriculture established.

President Lincoln, sold on Newton's plan, had congress in 1862 authorize an agriculture bureau, the forerunner of the present department of agriculture. Newton was made the first commissioner under the new bureau and selected the present grounds for the department. Many of the present plans of the department were the direct outgrowth of the foundation work laid by Commissioner Newton before his death in 1867. The father of the department of agriculture died, the result of a sunstroke he received while protecting some of his wheat experiments.

*Dependence*







